

PRESS RELEASE

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MAN SENTENCED TO 33 MONTHS IN ALIEN SMUGGLING CONSPIRACY CASE

PHOENIX -- The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on June 14, 2004, Luis Carlos Leon-Mendez, DOB 9/10/73, was sentenced to 33 months in prison, after being convicted by a federal jury on December 16, 2003 of Harboring Illegal Aliens and Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens. Leon-Mendez's three co-defendants, Jose Angel Rangel-Quinones, Pastor Saucedo-Lopez and Joel Saul Acosta-Chavez all pled guilty to smuggling charges prior to trial and each was sentenced to 24 months in prison.

The evidence at the Leon-Mendez trial showed that in August of 2003, a group of Mexican nationals contracted to be smuggled into the United States for \$1500 each. The aliens were guided through the desert, then taken to an apartment in Phoenix. The next day, a group of armed men forced entry into the apartment and kidnaped the aliens, taking them at gunpoint to a stash house at 4023 W. Hadley Street in Phoenix where the aliens saw two men who had been tied up, blindfolded and beaten. The aliens were threatened that if their families didn't pay their smuggling fees immediately they would be left in the desert or have a hand or foot cut off.

Leon-Mendez was arrested at the apartment with his co-defendants and the group of aliens. Subsequent searches of the suspects and the apartment revealed three firearms and

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other evidence of a smuggling operation having been run out of the apartment, including a shrine erected to Jesus Malverde, who has been adopted by alien smugglers as their patron saint.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The prosecution is being handled by Mary Beth Pfister, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-940-PHX-EHC
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